

## CHICAGOLAND PAGES 5-11

## Study evaluates a missing link

Illiana tollway  
could ease traffic  
in south corridor

By Richard Wronski  
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One hundred years after Daniel Burnham proposed an "outer encircling highway" to bypass Chicago, a new study says that building a key segment — an interstate linking Illinois and Indiana — could significantly cut traffic congestion and boost the region's economy.

The Illiana Expressway would connect Interstate 57 in Will County with Interstate 65 in Lake County, Ind. The 25- to 30-mile superhighway, built as a tollway, could cost as much as \$1 billion.

In what would be a first for the Chicago area, an eight-lane Illiana might also feature four truck-only lanes, a significant accommodation for the freight-dependent and trucking industries.

Since Burnham first hinted at the Illiana in his Plan of Chicago in 1909, the proposed highway has been a dream of subsequent planners seeking to ease the region's ever-growing congestion, particularly on two interstates, Interstate 80/94 and the Indiana Toll Road (Interstate 90).

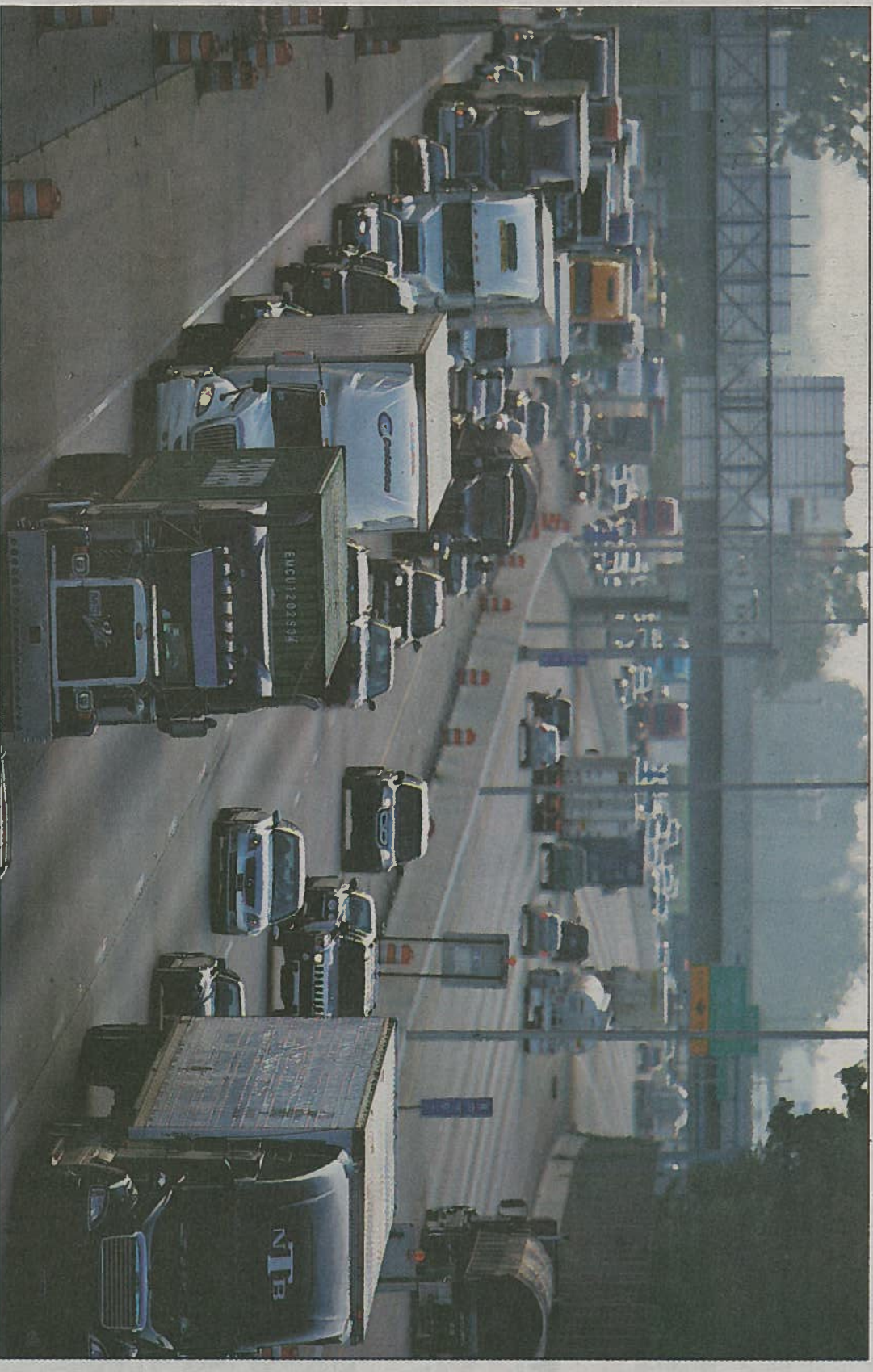
Indeed, motorists on I-80/94, known as the Frank Borman Expressway in Indiana, have long faced nonstop construction — the highway is being expanded to 10 lanes — but know that the highway will never be wide enough.

The two interstates and U.S. Highway 30 carry a combined 216,000 vehicles a day across the Illinois-Indiana border, according to the feasibility study by the consulting firm Cambridge Systematics Inc. at the behest of the Indiana and Illinois departments of transportation.

The rate of congestion, measured by vehicle hours traveled, is predicted to grow on these roads by almost 64 percent by 2030, according to the study. More than half of the increased traffic will come from heavy trucks.

The Cambridge study doesn't make any specific recommendation for or against the Illiana, according to Barbara Sloan, its principal author. That decision will be up to the two states.

The Illiana has long been a hot-button issue in Indiana. "No Illiana Expressway" signs sprouted like dandelions in 2006 when Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels tried to fast-track the project. Fierce opposition prompted officials to lop off a leg to I-94 near Michigan City.



Despite ongoing expansion projects, the Borman Expressway (Interstate 80/94 in northwest Indiana) faces nearly constant congestion, such as this backup approaching Interstate 65, which some say could be relieved by a new tollway linking Illinois and Indiana highways. E. JASON WAMMERSGAUS/TRIBUNE PHOTO



SOURCE: ESRI, TeleAtlas, IDOT and INDOT

Illinois officials, though, say the proposed highway doesn't go far enough. To address growth and new intermodal development in the south suburbs, the Illiana should extend all the way to Interstate 55 near Joliet, planners say.

An Indiana committee of legislators has begun its review of the study. The chairwoman, state Sen. Sue Landske (R-Cedar Lake), said the panel hopes to make its recommendation before the end of the year.

Here are the study's major findings and key issues:

**Where would the Illiana be built?**

The study identifies three possible routes:

■ The southernmost corridor is the longest. It would run about 60 miles from I-57 between Peotone/Manteno and connect with I-65 at Indiana Highway 2.

■ The central corridor would begin southeast of Peotone and extend about 25 miles east to I-65, about two miles north of Indiana 2.

■ The northernmost corridor, also about 25 miles, would connect with the north access to the proposed Peotone airport, then run east to I-65 about 2.5 miles south of Indiana Highway 231.

**How many lanes would the Illiana have?**

Four options are proposed: four-, six- and eight-lane configurations, and one with eight lanes that includes four truck-only lanes.

**Why truck-only lanes?**

Separating autos and trucks may be a beneficial way to build more capacity and increase travel reliability, for which shippers would be willing to pay a premium, Cambridge said. Studies also suggest separating auto and truck traffic is safer.

**How much would it cost?**

Building the highway would cost from \$600 million to more than \$1 billion, depending on the corridor and number of lanes. Possible funding includes tolls much higher than current levels.

The study also suggests the possibility of funding and construction by a public-private partnership. Both the Indiana Toll Road and the Chicago Skyway are leased to private consortiums.

**Why is the highway needed?**

The study says the Illiana would relieve the huge volume of traffic, particularly trucks, on existing highways, including I-80/94 in Indiana (the Borman) and the Indiana Toll Road (I-90), as well as I-65 and roads such as U.S. 30.

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At one spot near the state line, the Borman carries 119,000 vehicles a day, including 34,000 trucks. But the Illiana might not relieve as much congestion as hoped. Heavy trucks serving long-distance destinations might be more likely to benefit from Illiana as a bypass option.

In addition, the likelihood that trucks will divert to the Illiana from I-94 is expected to be "rather low" because only a small portion of these trucks are headed to or from the South and Southwest U.S.

So who wants the Illiana?

The study found significant support for the Illiana in Will County, which has a high concentration of freight-related economic activity. Will has a large number of existing and proposed intermodal facilities, as well as infrastructure projects, including the possible Peotone airport.

South suburban leaders and planners want the Illiana to extend beyond I-57 to I-55

near Joliet. "A connection to I-55 makes a lot more sense," said Ed Paesel, executive director of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association.

**Who doesn't?**

While the study determined that Will County strongly favors the Illiana, largely rural Lake County, Ind., is not so enthusiastic.

"Businesses and local communities will potentially benefit from economic development, while farmers and environmentalists will be focused on minimizing land impacts," the study said.

**What happens next?**

The recommendation will go to the states' departments of transportation. Local officials and planners would like to get a commitment from IDOT and Gov. Pat Quinn, Paesel said.

Then, a "Phase 1" study, involving engineering and environmental analysis, could begin. That study would determine where and how it would be built.

"We need to be building this in one seamless way," said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

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